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The Near East

WITH A SPECIAL MAP SUPPLEMENT

A Radio Discussion by

- H. A. R. GIBB
- WILLIAM HOCKING
- PHILIP IRELAND

36th BROADCAST IN COOPERATION WITH THE NATIONAL BROADCASTING COMPANY • 224

JUNE 28, 1942

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

ROUND TABLE

REG. U.S. PAT. OFF.

Published weekly. 10 cents a copy; five copies, 25 cents; full-year subscription, 52 issues, two dollars. Published by the University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois. Entered as second-class matter January 3, 1939, at the post office at Chicago, Illinois, under the Act of March 3, 1879.

No. 224

NOTE

The supplementary information contained in the footnotes to the following text, developed by staff research, is not to be considered as representing the opinions of the ROUND TABLE *speakers. Following the transcript of the broadcast are questions which readers may wish to use for analysis and discussion. It is hoped that teachers and discussion leaders may find this additional service of the* ROUND TABLE *transcript helpful in their study of the subject discussed in the broadcast.*

THE NEAR EAST

A UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO ROUND TABLE BROADCAST*

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William E. Hocking, Chairman of the Department of Philosophy, Harvard University

Philip W. Ireland, Department of Political Science, University of Chicago

* A radio discussion broadcast from the University of Chicago, over stations of the National Broadcasting Company, Sunday, June 28, 1942, at 1:30 P.M., Central War Time.

The Round Table, oldest educational program continuously on the air, is broadcast entirely without a script, although participants meet in advance, prepare a topical outline, and exchange data and views. Subjects are chosen because of their social, political, or economic significance. The program has no "ax to grind." In the selection of speakers, the effort is to provide a balanced discussion by participants who have special competence and knowledge. The opinion of each speaker is his own and in no way involves the responsibility of either the University of Chicago or the National Broadcasting Company.

THE NEAR EAST

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The focus of battle has been turned upon another strategic geographical area—the Near East. It is said that the outcome of this war may depend upon who is master of this region.

What is the Near East? Whose side is it on—politically, economically, and culturally? What problems does it pose the leaders of the United Nations—now and for the future?

To answer these and other questions, the University of Chicago ROUND TABLE *called upon two distinguished scholars who were attending the Norman Wait Harris Foundation Institute on "The Near East" at the University to discuss this subject with the director of the Institute.*

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MR. IRELAND: As director of the Eighteenth Harris Institute, which brought Gibb from England and Hocking from Harvard, I'd like to take advantage of this opportunity to tap their special knowledge of our topic.

The Axis' forces have pushed within cannon range of the main defense around Matrûh in the first stage of the battle for Egypt.[1]

MR. HOCKING: Then the main battle of the Near East is now joined.

MR. GIBB: Before we try to assess the possible significance of the defeat in Libya, I think we ought to be clear in our minds as to why we consider the Near East so important. I suppose each of us has different ideas, and we may, if we add them together, reach some sort of general conclusion.

MR. HOCKING: Well, the Near East is geographically the switch-

[1] The British relinquished Matrûh to the Germans June 28, 1942.

board between various parts of the world, especially for our lines of communication, east and west and north and south. For example, British planes to India customarily alight in Egypt and Iraq. Then, again, there is the crumbling confidence of the whole Arab world in the military power of their political friends—and behind that, of course, the great background of supplies.

MR. IRELAND: Isn't it even more than that?

MR. GIBB: I should be inclined to say so. I think that people don't realize the importance of the Mediterranean for the economic life of Europe as a whole—an importance that can scarcely be overstressed. And, by holding the naval bases and a military position at the eastern end of the Mediterranean, we of the United Nations prevent the Axis from getting complete control of the Mediterranean. So long as we can prevent Hitler from getting complete control of the Mediterranean, his talk of a self-sufficient Europe is just so much hot air.

MR. IRELAND: In addition, there is the Suez Canal. Eden once said that the Suez Canal was the main arterial highway of the Empire, to which Matsuoka immediately replied by saying that when the Suez Canal goes the British Empire goes. There are other factors, aren't there?

MR. HOCKING: Such as the possible loss of our supply route to Russia, from the head of the Persian Gulf across the Middle East; and while that is not an immediate threat, it is certainly a future possibility.

MR. IRELAND: Then I suppose we ought to add to that the supply route to the Middle East, or on to India. From the American standpoint, we have established a route from the west coast of Africa to Egypt and Cairo, as sort of an eastern bridgehead. If we lost that bridgehead, it would certainly affect us.

I received a letter yesterday from a man who made the trip from New York to the Middle East in two weeks. That is much faster than the two months which it takes by steamer.

MR. GIBB: There is also the question of the vital products that Hitler would get if he were successful in obtaining the Near East.

MR. IRELAND: Before the war Germany got one-half of its chrome from Turkey.

MR. GIBB: Yes, and under the new agreements she doesn't get any at all until 1943. And then there is Egyptian cotton, which Germany wants; there's oil, which will help her at least to replenish her stocks. Most of all, as Hocking has said, there is that mastery over the minds and imagination of the peoples.

I like to think of Tobruk, of Egypt, and of the Near East as a kind of fortress which we have established at the eastern end of the Mediterranean. It's blocking Hitler's exits to the East. Turkey is one of its main bastions. It is protecting the lines of communication which are essential.

And these expeditions into Libya have been sorties, and on one of them we were successful in establishing an advanced outwork at Tobruk. That advanced outwork has now gone, but as yet the fortress of the Near East still stands. Everything depends upon whether we can prevent the enemy from getting a foothold inside it. If he does, then I'm afraid the bastions, including Turkey, will go.

MR. IRELAND: Of course. I like your point about the Mediterranean, because until the Germans get the Mediterranean they really can't make much use of the oil of Iraq. I once made a study of that, and I found that there were only about two hundred tank cars in all of Turkey; therefore, until the Nazis can use the pipe line across the Mediterranean, they can't use that oil.[2] But if the loss of the Near East means the loss of the Mediterranean, it is certainly vital. We've been talking about the Near East and its importance. Just exactly what *is* the Near East?

MR. HOCKING: Just to make a list, I should mention Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Palestine, Egypt, and Arabia.

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[2] See Philip W. Ireland, "Berlin to Baghdad Up-to-Date," *Foreign Affairs*, April, 1941.

MR. GIBB: We British would call that the Middle East, although our Middle East would include also Iran and Afghanistan.[3]

MR. IRELAND: That means, then, that we have a territory of about a million square miles, or about a third of the territory of this country, inhabited by a group of about fifty million people, again about two-fifths of our own population. I think we ought to say something about these people. Who are they?

MR. HOCKING: The main division is between Turk and Arab.

MR. IRELAND: We mustn't forget the Iranians, though.

MR. HOCKING: And the Iranians. The Turk and the Arab are certainly not the same. The Turk has a great pride in his background with the Hittites; and he also takes a certain satisfaction in his relations with the European peoples. He now attempts to make the distinction between his habits and the habits of the Arabic peoples, with whom he has been so long culturally associated, even to the point of severing himself from the Arabic script.

MR. GIBB: We mustn't forget, too, that the Turks speak a completely different language. Even their historical background is quite different from that of the Arabs. I like to think of the Turks as a small people who lost a great empire in the last war but who fought through to build up a new, stable country of their own.

MR. HOCKING: By the way, what do you mean by an Arab? Is an Arab always an inhabitant of Arabia?

MR. GIBB: By no means. There are Arabs from Iraq through Syria, Palestine, and Egypt right across Africa to the Atlantic, at the far end of the Mediterranean.

MR. HOCKING: Is he always one who speaks Arabic?

MR. GIBB: He always speaks some kind of Arabic, but there are different kinds of spoken Arabic. All Arabs, however, are intensely

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[3] What the Americans refer to as the "Balkans" is designated by the British as the "Near East." What is referred to in American usage as the "Near East" is designated by the British as the "Middle East."

proud of their written language—the language in which was written not only the Koran but a vast literature which goes back fifteen hundred years.

MR. HOCKING: You wouldn't say, would you, that an Arab is always or nearly always a Moslem?

MR. GIBB: Well, yes, nearly always. I suppose there are two or perhaps three million Arabs who are not Moslems, but of the fifty millions of Arabs the great majority are Moslems.

The Arabs are also a rather easygoing people. Remember that they live in an area which is wider than the United States.

MR. HOCKING: Would you say that an Arab is usually a man who lives in tents and rides a camel?

MR. GIBB: There are Arabs who live in tents and ride camels, but they don't, of course, represent anything like the majority of Arabs. Most of them are just people who live in towns and villages like the people of any other country.

MR. HOCKING: And they have some great cities, with culture and background.

MR. GIBB: Yes. Damascus, Bagdad, Aleppo—just to mention a few—may not be great cities in comparison with New York or Chicago, but they are old and organized centers of urban and industrial life.

MR. HOCKING: Does European and Western civilization owe anything to the Arabs?

MR. GIBB: There is no doubt whatever that medieval Arabic culture (a subject on which I could deliver a whole lecture, if you wanted to listen) is one of the great historical cultures and that it transmitted to us much of the old Greek culture, including Aristotle.

MR. IRELAND: What about the religions of the Near East?

MR. HOCKING: The three great religions of the Near East are Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. Of these, of course, the most widespread is Islam, and each of these has several subdivisions.

MR. GIBB: We must remember perhaps the most important of the Christian units is Lebanon, that little area of mountains in the middle of the coast of Syria.

MR. IRELAND: Do you think these religions are divisive factors?

MR. HOCKING: They may be, but they are becoming less and less so. In Egypt, for example, the Copts and the Moslems have learned to live side by side, with the recognition of the dominance of the political interests for political purposes. I believe that the same thing is true of other parts of the Near East.

MR. IRELAND: What's actually true, then, is that the Near East is a web of complexities of religions and of peoples which, as in a great many other areas, will have to be sorted out eventually.

A question affecting the United Nations' effort to hold the Near East is whether or not its peoples and countries are on our side.

MR. GIBB: I think, in the first place, we must distinguish between Turks and Arabs. I should say that the Turks (just to take them first) are very warmly on the side of the United Nations. Their sympathies have been with us since perhaps the days of sanctions, when, you remember, they joined with other nations in imposing sanctions against Italy.

MR. HOCKING: How does that square with the Iraqi Revolt of 1941?

MR. GIBB: That has to do rather with the Arabs, who stand on a rather different footing than do the Turks in that respect.

The Arabs look at questions in a more personal way than we do. We all know the kind of man who has a grouch and who, because of that personal grouch, won't see sense. And some Arabs and Egyptians, of course, have grouches against the British in the past, and that has left its mark. But, generally speaking, they do see sense. They know very well what an Axis victory would mean for them.

MR. HOCKING: That reminds me of a story. In Egypt, some years ago, I asked an Arab what he thought of the British position in Egypt. He had nothing very good to say of it, especially of the

ten thousand soldiers then quartered in Cairo. But I asked him if he would prefer to transfer the authority from England to Italy, and his reply was, "God save us!"

MR. GIBB: That rather confirms what I was going to say in answer to your question about the Iraqi Revolt.

The Iraqi Revolt really was the proof of this fundamental conviction of the Arabs that their interests lie on the side of the United Nations, because there's no doubt that the Iraqi rebels thought that the moment they started their rising there would be risings and revolts all over the Arab world. However, they got very little support even in Iraq, and it was that lack of support that broke the rising—the fact that the Arab world didn't side with them. It wasn't the failure of German support.

MR. IRELAND: I'd like to return for a moment to say a word more about Turkey. Don't you think that perhaps the German propaganda and von Papen have had some influence in persuading Turkey to take an Axis part?

MR. GIBB: I don't think that one must exaggerate the influence of German propaganda in Turkey or of von Papen's activities. There is no doubt the Turks did sign an economic agreement with Germany, but that was because of their need of a Central European market as an outlet for some of their goods and for their own economic requirements. On the other hand, as far as the Arab world is concerned, German propaganda has a rather wider field of action and one which is broadened by the question of Palestine.

MR. IRELAND: Yes. Many authorities do agree that that is a major key to the whole Near East problem. Certainly it is a great problem to us here in America. What are its basic elements?

MR. HOCKING: I should say that the primary element is the idea of a free Jewish community, showing the cultural possibilities of the Jews in modern times. Behind that is the problem of the European refugees—a growing problem, which is evidently tangent to the first but entirely separable from it. Third is the economic future of the

Near East, in which the question of who is to take the leadership and who, therefore, will have the economic domination of that extremely important center is prominent.

We must not forget, either, the political problem of the control of an extremely strategic corner of the world. And, finally, there are real world-interests, especially the religious interests which center in Palestine, which cannot be excluded, since each of the three great religions regards Palestine as in some sense a holy place.[4]

MR. IRELAND: What about Palestine's strategic importance?

MR. GIBB: Looking at it from the Arab point of view, they have a definite strategic interest in Palestine, in that Palestine is the section which holds together the western half of the Arab world, from Egypt westward, and the eastern half in western Asia. They feel that if Palestine is separated from the rest of the Arabic world, the Arab world will be cut in half.

MR. IRELAND: There's certainly something in that.

MR. HOCKING: We must remember also that the important route of the pilgrimage to Medina and Mecca lies through Palestine, since it must follow the line of what is called the "green crescent," and any section of territory which would cut across this crescent, beginning with the Mediterranean Sea, running back to the desert, and constituting a kind of corridor, would be very difficult for the Arab world to accept.

MR. IRELAND: Then you think that there are questions of political and economic importance?

MR. HOCKING: And geographically important questions, because it is really a matter not of the amount of area that is concerned but of the functions which those square miles can perform.

MR. IRELAND: I have been awe-struck by the economic advance-

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[4] In addition to the traditional importance of Jerusalem to Jews and Christians, it was the first Holy Place toward which Mohammed's followers turned in prayer before Mecca became the Moslem sacred city. In addition, the mosque of Omar in Jerusalem is an especially sacred Moslem shrine.

ment of Palestine. I also feel that perhaps that's one of the causes of fear among the Arabs.[5] For instance, there is the general argument that the Arabs have had their position improved by Zionism. On the other hand, it seems true also that the Arabs notice that change and feel that with political power their own position may be retarded and they may never have a chance to advance to the present position occupied by the Zionist. You wouldn't say that the Arabs are incapable of economic development, would you?

MR. GIBB: Certainly not! I quite agree with you that there is a very strong feeling among the Arabs of their present economic backwardness and a fear of political string-pulling which is motivated and carried out by economic ambitions. But they have complete confidence that with time and opportunity they will be able to acquire technical skills.

MR. HOCKING: Have you any examples of that improvement in economic power?

MR. GIBB: I should think that if one goes around to the big irrigation works which are now being set up in Iraq and in Egypt, if one goes to the oil-pumping stations which are being established in Arabia, you'll find that a great majority of the workmen, at least the engineers, are Arabs. The time has yet to come when they will become the technicians in charge, but it is rapidly coming.

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[5] The Jewish population in Palestine rose from 81,000 in 1920 to 456,000 in 1940, when Arabs numbered about 1,000,000. This increase in numbers and superior economic enterprise led to violent attacks by Arabs against the Jews and against the British, which culminated in civil war in 1938. In 1937 Great Britain severely limited Jewish immigration. The British had to contend with Moslem influence on British policy in India and Arabia, which strengthened the Arab pressure on the British in Palestine. In 1938 a British commission recommended to Parliament that Palestine should be divided into a Jewish, an Arab, and a British state. A conference of all parties failed to agree on details. Then, in 1939, the British government proposed that Palestine should be granted independence as a unit in ten years, with Jewish immigration limited to 75,000 in the first five years and thereafter subject to Arab permission. The League of Nations mandate commission declared that the plan violated the terms of the mandate and refused ratification.

Mr. Ireland: I've heard a number of Arabs say that if they had the five hundred million dollars of capital which has been imported into Palestine, they could use it to good advantage.

Of course, an important factor in this situation is the part played by Axis radio propaganda, which plays on the fear of the Arabs.

Mr. Hocking: Wouldn't you say that there are two types of Zionism and that the fears of the Arabs are due to a certain extreme party which does not express the fundamental conception of Zionism?[6] Of course, there are extreme parties on both sides. These two extremes are not in accord with each other, and there are other positions which would be in full accord.

Mr. Gibb: That's true. As long as you are dealing with extremists, it seems to me there is no kind of solution possible. There is the Zionist extremist who talks of introducing two, three, five, or six million Jews into Palestine and of driving all the Arabs out. On the other hand, there is the Arab extremist who says, "Well, there must be no Jews in Palestine; or, if there are going to be Jews, they must be a minority, with minority status like any other minority."

Mr. Ireland: Are you suggesting that there is a middle way?

Mr. Gibb: There *must* be a middle way. But the first difficulty is to find a just middle way. The second difficulty is to persuade the majority, the reasonable majority, of both parties that the middle way is the best for them.

Mr. Ireland: Do you think the Axis has taken advantage of

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[6] In general, Zionism is the plan to establish an autonomous Jewish state in Palestine. It has a twofold source—the ancient dream of a restored Israel and the need of an asylum for oppressed Jews. The Zionist Organization was founded in 1897, under the leadership of Theodore Herzl. Its aim was, with the consent of other governments, to secure from Turkey a charter for Jewish colonization of Palestine en masse. To many, however, this appeared remote or impossible of attainment. Accordingly, a party of so-called "practical Zionists" urged an immediate beginning of gradual settlement in Palestine in order eventually to bring about a Jewish majority in the population of the country and Jewish control of its religious, cultural, and economic development. A number of other parties, with somewhat variant programs, likewise sprang up within the Zionist movement.

any of these difficulties to cause the Arabs to adopt an anti-Ally or a pro-Axis attitude? My own view is that it's extremely wrong to call Arabs "fascists." They are democratic. As you know, when all Arabs are under a tent, all are equal; and you know about the democracy of Islam, Hocking.

MR. HOCKING: It is the most democratic of all religions.

MR. GIBB: I should say that equality is bred in the bone of Arabs, and I would assert confidently that if and when the Arabs establish a more stable national system it will be essentially a democratic system. In the meantime, of course, the Germans are doing their very best to try to sow trouble, distrust, and suspicion, and are using the Palestine question as a basis for that propaganda.

I don't think that we ought to consider the Palestine question as the only question that affects the future of the Arab world, but it is one of the most difficult questions which has to be met if we are ever going to bring the Arabs wholeheartedly to the side of the United Nations in this struggle.

MR. IRELAND: What do you think the Zionists hold as their basic position in Palestine?

MR. HOCKING: It is very important to remember the precise position of the Balfour Agreement of 1917, which is often misunderstood. The agreement was not in favor of turning over to Palestine the whole country as *the* national home of the Jews but that of favoring the establishment in Palestine of *a* national home for the Jews.[7] The reasons for that, of course, have appeared. That is the position of what we would call cultural Zionism, and that is the hopeful position for the future.

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[7] On November 2, 1917, Lord Balfour issued the following statement on behalf of the British government: "His Majesty's government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which will prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country."

Mr. Ireland: It certainly is that. I think anyone who's ever been to Palestine during the last fifteen or twenty years cannot help being struck by the tremendous vitality of the Zionists in the country, the changes they've made, and the great joy with which they have come to Palestine to create a cultural home there.

Mr. Gibb: I should say that the reasonable Arab nationalists (and there are still reasonable Arab nationalists, although war propaganda and war psychosis and all the other war diseases tend to drive men to extremism) do realize that the maintenance of a Jewish national home in Palestine is a desirable thing in itself, and they hope that we shall help them, some time, to solve these problems.

Mr. Ireland: True. Now, I've always heard it mentioned in connection with the Nazi technique of trying to divide and conquer that they've used the question of the Jewish army to awaken the fears of the Arabs. Surely there must be something to be said for the Jewish army?

Mr. Hocking: Certainly! The Jewish army is a most rational and plausible proposal which would be entirely prudent were it not for the fears which it excites as to its later use.

Mr. Ireland: I think that's perfectly true. Gibb, could you summarize some of the things we have touched?

Mr. Gibb: Rather than to try to summarize a discussion which has been so general, I would say that the Arabs as a whole are distrustful of promises. We've got to help the Arabs get together. We've got to help them to overcome the difficulties in the way of uniting. We have to help them, also, out of their chronic poverty. They don't want promises.

Mr. Ireland: They have had promises in the past, you mean?

Mr. Gibb: And they don't want any more. And in this war, as far as I know, no promises have been given, but there has been a British statement of policy—a policy that Great Britain is prepared to help the Arabs toward federation. And it seems to me that any kind of action that we take should be an implementing of policy

and not the making of promises and then trying to live up to them or to the interpretation which other people put upon our promises.

Mr. Hocking: Such as bringing the Atlantic Charter into specific terms of application to the peoples of the Near East?

Mr. Gibb: Undoubtedly.

Mr. Ireland: Do you think that if we do get the peoples of the Near East to feel that we intend to implement the Atlantic Charter, there might be some value in that?

Mr. Hocking: A declaration by our government to that effect would be most important.

Mr. Ireland: It would swing the people of the Near East generally, both north and south, in behind the cause of the United Nations. Is that your view?

Mr. Hocking: That's my view.

Mr. Ireland: We have not talked about the military situation in the Near East because we are not armchair generals.

We have reviewed some of the facts and figures in the background. We have agreed that the Near East is important because of the importance of the Mediterranean and of the Suez Canal, the potential danger to the supply route to Russia and to the Middle East, the question of power prestige, and all that. It's an extremely complex area.

We've also taken up the question of the attitudes of the Arabs and of the Turks and concluded that they are far from being pro-Axis. They have full knowledge of the German and Italian record and appreciate what Axis domination would mean to them. They want independence. They distrust past promises.

And we have agreed that what is needed is something which will convince the Arabs and the Turks that they will have a responsible place in the world after this war is won.

SUGGESTED READINGS

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QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The following questions of wider scope, intended for discussion, are suggested by the broadcast, and answers may be found in the literature on the subject listed in the section "Suggested Readings," found on page 15.

*

1. In your opinion how would the loss of the Near East affect the position of the United Nations? What is the strategic significance of the Near East?
2. Discuss the attitude of the governments and peoples of the Near East toward Britain and the United Nations. Do you think Turkey will join the Axis if the Near East is lost? Are the Egyptians pro-Ally?
3. How does the Palestine problem add to the difficulties of holding the Near East? Analyze the Jewish-Arab conflict. How much progress have the Zionists made in Palestine? What are the prospects of peace in Palestine?
4. What is the importance of Arab nationalism? What are its sources? Would you say that the Arabs are pro-Ally? Do you agree that democracy is a natural attribute of Arab life?
5. Under what conditions might the Moslems rise in a religious war against the Axis? How successfully have German propagandists been in setting the Moslems against the United Nations?
6. What are the important economic resources in the Near East? Is Axis Europe a self-sufficient economic entity without the Near East?
7. What has been the success of the attempts at democratic or representative government on the part of some countries in the Near East since World War I? Did the mandates system hinder or help in developing the capacity for self-government?
8. How could the Atlantic Charter be brought into specific terms of application to the peoples of the Near East?

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Do You Understand the Economics of War?

You should read: *Defense Inventory* (*191*), *Little Business: What Now?* (*193*), *What Does Rationing Mean?* (*198*), *How To Meet the Menace of Inflation* (*200*), and *War Profits* (*214*).

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A UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO ROUND TABLE BROADCAST

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JULY 5, 1942

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WILBER G. KATZ, Dean of the Law School, University of Chicago

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[PRINTED IN U.S.A.]